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ABSTRACT

Data on the attention patterns of Sesame Street's intended target audience were analyzed and compared with data on middle-class children. Attention scores gleaned from a series of formative research studies performed in New York day care centers in 1972 and 1973 yielded the following conclusions: (1) within each of the four categories of affect segments analyzed, a range of low to high attention scores was observed; (2) Sesame Street target children preferred cooperation and anger affect segments over those involving fear and pride. Middle-class children differed from Sesame Street target children in attention to the affect areas of pride and anger, giving greater attention to pride and less attention to anger. (PF)

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MEMORANDUM

Children's Television Workshop

DATE: March 4, 1974

TO: Sesame Street Production & Writers

CC:

FROM: Sesame Street Research

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SUBJECT: Reviews of in-house research on Sesame Street target children's attention to four categories of affect segments.

Following Harry Lasker's presentation last month of the responses of a group of middle-class children to various pride and anger Sesame Street affect segments, we have reviewed Sesame Street's intended target audience's attention data to various affect segments in order to explore the validity and generalizability of Lasker's findings to our target population.

Section One is a compilation of our target children's responses to four categories of affect segments: pride, anger, cooperation and fear (Tables 1 and 2) and a comparison of our findings with those responses of middle class children (Table 3).

Section two, which will follow two weeks hence, will describe the production formats, techniques and treatments which:

1) were found to represent the segment attributes of each of the affect categories and

2) were found to distinguish high attention segments from medium and low attention segments.

A third section will be provided to compare those attributes which seem to affect our target audience with those attributes that affect the middle-class audience used in Harry Lasker's pilot study.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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IR003 142

Section One: Attention Data from Sesame Street Target Children

Summary:

This report summarizes an analysis of in-house data reflecting Sesame Street's target children's attention to a variety of affect segments. Attention scores were gleaned from a series of formative research studies performed in New York Day Care Centers over the past two years. Whether more recent Sesame Street Affect Segments will elicit similar patterns of attention will strongly depend upon how similar in production format and technique the new segments are to those reported here.* Below we have listed the general conclusions reported in the first section.

1. Within each of the four categories of affect segments analyzed, a range of low to high attention scores was observed (Table 1).

2. The average attention scores of Sesame Street target children differ for each category of affect segments. Ranked in order of relative attention, our target children preferred the following affect categories:

Cooperation	(1)
Anger	(2)
Fear	(3)
Pride	(4)

(Summarized from Table 2)

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*Note: Section II will provide an analysis of the production attributes of selected segments listed in Table 1 of Section I.

3. The average length of affect segments differs for each affect goal category. When ranked according to the average length of a segment, goal categories differed in the following manner:

Cooperation	(1:38)
Anger	(1:43)
Pride	(2:43)
Fear	(3:33)

4. When comparing Sesame Street target children to the middle class children from Harry Lasker's pilot study, we find the following differences in attention to the affect areas of Pride and Anger:

	Sesame Street Target Children	Lasker's Pilot Study With Middle-Class Children
	Relative Attention	
Pride	Low	High
Anger	High	Low

1.1 Descriptive Data

Since Sesame Street Research compiled data from several in-house attention studies, two different methods of observation were used to record the target child's attention to program segments: Both Group Observation (G.O.) and Distractor (Dist.) methods were used.

Table 1 displays the observed attention scores* and further translates these scores into uniform ranks. Ranks were determined based upon a five point scale:

Method of Observation		Rank
Distractor (Dist.)	Group Observation (G.O.)	
90% - 100%	Excellent	1
80% - 89%	Very Good	2
70% - 79%	Good	3
60% - 69%	Fair	4
0 - 59%	Poor	5

Table 1 lists the affect segments according to goal area and also designates the length of each bit.

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*Note: Although we, together with production, have often argued that attention scores for any one bit represent a relative index of attention rather than an absolute index of attention (i.e., relative to:

a. the context of other bits tested, and to

b. the variability in viewing behavior of the specific sample of children selected),

in every case we have presented in Table 1 the absolute attention score of our target children. The reasons for this are straightforward: First, determining the influence of context upon attention was not uniformly possible with our data. Second, there seems to be considerable evidence (e.g., Lang Rust & Dan Anderson) to support the belief that the influence of one segment upon attention to another is not as pervasive as imagined. Third, for our traditional attention questions, small samples have been considered adequate, and no attempts have been made to test for the reliability of our data with other samples.

Descriptions of Sesame Street Target Children's Attention to Four Categories of Affect Segments

Table 1
Affect
Category: PRIDE

3a

Name of Bit	Show #
1. Song: Everyone Makes Mistakes	263
2. Unhappy Empire	346
3. Roosevelt Franklin Spells His Name	289
4. Roosevelt Franklin - Days of the Week	324
5. Ernie: Everybody is Different	269
6. Susan & Kids: Proud	262
7. Green Song	286
8. Bert & Ernie: I'm Special	276/296
9. Baby Cookie	407
10. The King's Problem	407
11. Jimmy Sings: I'm Somebody	611

Time	Attention Scores	Rank
1:54	G.O.: poor	5
3:39	G.O.: poor	5
2:42	G.O.: good	3
3:26	G.O.: very good/ excellent	1.5
2:29	G.O.: excellent	1
2:00	G.O.: poor	5
1:55	G.O.: poor	5
1:53	G.O.: fair	4
:57	G.O.: very good/ good/fair	3
3:48	G.O.: poor	5
5:15	Dist: 47%	5

Descriptions of Sesame Street Target Children's Attention to Four Categories of Affect Segments

Table 1
Affect Category: ANGER

3b

Name of Bit	Show #
1. Mad Song	273
2. Bert Gets Angry	267
3. Lines #1 (abstract)	276
4. Maria vs Oscar Conflict	277
5. AM Kids Fight Over a Book	297
6. Share the Chair	397
7. Bill Cosby - Angry	144

Time	Attention Scores	Rank
2:14	G.O.: excellent	1
2:44	G.O.: fair	4
1:33	G.O.: very good	2
3:14	Dist.: 86%	2
1:31	G.O.: good	3
:32	Dist: 58%/94%	3
:18	Dist: 47%	5

Descriptions of Sesame Street Target Children's Attention to Four Categories of Affect Segments

Table 1

Affect Category: FEAR

Name of Bit	Show#
1. Touch & Feel	252
2. Grover Talks about Fear	397
3. Seven Monsters	247
4. Monster Opera (short) (Song: Imagination)	493
5. Monster Opera (long)	-
6. Count & Hooper Greeting: 10 Dolls	513
7. Cookie & Count Cooperate	514

Time	Attention Scores	Rank
1:33	G.O.: fair	4
3:15	G.O.: good/fair	3.5
1:14	G.O.: very good	2
3:50	Dist: 58%	5
11:00	Dist: 75%	3
2:18	Dist: 70% G.O.: very good	2.5
2:12	Dist: 8 G.O.: excellent	1.5

Descriptions of Sesame Street Target Children's Attention to Four Categories of Affect Segments

Table 1
Affect Category: COOPERATION

3d

Name of Bit	Show#	Time
1. Lines #1	300	1:30
2. Lines #2	288	1:44
3. Ernie & Bert Cooperate With Peanut Butter & Bread	288	2:58
4. Cooperation Crossover	325	1:10
5. Cooperation: Fish Fry	270	1:24
6. Cooperation Story: Pop Ons	280	:48
7. Cookie & Count Cooperate	514	2:09
Oregon Study		
8. Serving Juice	276	1:06
9. Drawing a House	276	2:11
10. One Hanger	290	1:42
11. Blocks & Trucks	396/294	1:17

Attention Scores	Rank
G.O.: very good Dist: 85%	2
G.O.: good/fair Dist: 83%	3
G.O.: fair/poor Dist: 80%	3.5
Dist: 80%	2
G.O.: fair/good	3.5
G.O.: fair/poor	4.5
G.O.: very good	2
G.O.: good	3
G.O.: good	3
Dist: 77%	3
G.O.: excellent	1

1.2 Interpretation of Table 1

The dispersion of attention scores within each affect category is self-evident. High, medium and low attention-getting segments exist within each category*.

When, however, we average the scaled attention scores for all segments in each affect category separately, we can distinguish patterns of attention for each affect goal area.

The rank order of attention scores for the four affect goal areas observed is listed in Table 2, as is the average time per bit within each of the affect categories.

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*Note: Further interpretation of attention scores for affect segments will be provided in Section II, following our analysis of the production attributes present within a sample of these segments.

Average Scaled Attention Scores and Average Time Per Bit
for Four Categories of Affect Segments

4a

Table 2

Affect Category	Rank Order of Attention Among all Categories
COOPERATION	1
ANGER	2
FEAR	3
*PRIDE	4

Average Scaled Attention Score for Affect Category	Average Time Per Bit
2.8 = very good/good	(1:38)
2.9 = very good/good	(1:43)
3.1 = good	(3:33)
3.9 = fair	(2:43)

2.1 Interpretation of Table 2

The most important point to note about Table 2 is the subordinate position of Pride relative to all the other affect categories. Pride ranks fourth in attention and on the average only elicits "fair" attention from our target audience. This finding is considerably different from the data reported by Harry Lasker and is of extreme importance when we consider the ascendancy of the goal of Pride within Sesame Street's curriculum objectives. In Section II, when we analyze the production attributes of a variety of affect segments, we will offer an explanation for this low attention data.

Second, we call attention to the relative positions of Anger in relation to Pride: Anger segments tend to show high attention in relation to Pride segments. Once again, this seems to controvert the data reported by Harry Lasker (more on this in our interpretation of Table 3).

Third, it is clear that the affect categories of cooperation, anger and fear show similar overall attention scores for the bits we have studied. Differences among these categories will perhaps become more clear in our investigation of program attributes in Section II.

Finally, we call your attention to the average time length per bit in each of the four categories. Cooperation and anger segments have similar average time lengths, and have similar relatively high attention patterns. Pride, on the other hand has a considerably longer average time length (one minute longer per segment than anger, for example) and a relatively low attention pattern.

Before inferring a direct relationship between segment length and attention pattern, however, note the average time length for Fear segments. Segments within this affect category seem to be longer on the average than segments from any other category - including Pride. Still, the overall attention scores for this category are considerably higher than for Pride. A word of explanation: the average time length for Fear segments is artificially inflated by one bit: the Monster Opera - long version (11:00 minutes). Attention to this segment was good (75%) despite its length, and considerably higher than the shorter version Monster Opera, which was only fair (58%). Obviously, then we cannot and should not infer a direct relationship between length of bit and amount of attention.

The reasons for the target children's increased attention to the longer version of Monster Opera from that of the shorter version will be explained when we analyze production techniques (i.e., in the attribute analysis of Section II).

3.1

In concluding Section I, we present Table 3 to compare the attention data of Sesame Street's target population to Pride & Anger segments with the data of middle class children as reported in the Harvard Pilot Study.

Table 3

A Comparison of Attention Data to Pride & Anger Affect Segments from Sesame Street Target Children and from the Middle Class Children of Harry Lasker's Pilot Study

	Sesame Street Target Audience	Middle Class Pilot Study
	Relative Attention	
Pride	Low	High
Anger	High	Low

What would account for this striking inversion in the attention patterns of our target children with those of the middle-class sample?

Although to date we do not have sufficient data to respond unequivocally to this question, we can tentatively offer some educated guesses:

First, just as middle class and Sesame Street target children differ in their verbal expressiveness, cognitive skills and general knowledge, it is similarly reasonable to believe that they differ in their patterns of attention. It seems likely, therefore that the child's viewing preferences will be determined not only by factors such as previous exposure and age, but also by the child's socio economic level.*

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*Note: See Research Memo ( ), wherein Dr. Dan Anderson of the University of Massachusetts compares in detail the attention patterns of both a Sesame Street target audience and a middle class target audience to Sesame Street Show #4.

Furthermore, it does seem possible that the goal areas themselves will be differentially appealing to the two audiences. It is a distinct possibility that middle class children who are more familiar with concepts of self selectively attend to pride segments, whereas our target audience, unfamiliar with this concept, display inattention.

Conversely, it is certainly possible that our target children, who may be more familiar with overt expressions of anger than middle class children, selectively attend to anger segments, whereas middle class children do not. However, this hypothesis of the "appeal of the familiar" seems to us insufficient to account for this inversion of the attention pattern, in light of so much counter-evidence which indicates the appeal strength of the novel and unfamiliar, as well as that of various other program dimensions. In short, then, no matter what the reasons for these differences, wide disparities between the sample populations do exist. We must, therefore be wary of making rash generalizations from non-target population studies.

In sections II and III we shall revisit these hypotheses in our attempt to explain these attention patterns in terms of program attributes (i.e., formats, techniques, characters, et al).